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Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, March 24, 2006

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Cox wants law to better protect kids

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

March 24, 2006

Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox called Thursday for changes in the state's Child Protection Law that would make exposing children to domestic violence tantamount to mental or emotional child abuse.

Cox said he would work with legislators to change laws and policies in the wake of the Ricky Holland murder case. The 7-year-old boy who lived near Williamston was killed by his parents, police say. While there were no reports of domestic violence in the home until January when his parents were arrested, Cox said the case has provoked a new look at how the state can better protect children.

"The tragedy of Ricky's death will be compounded if we do not learn from the circumstances that led to his death and institute changes to help protect Michigan's most valuable resource -- our children," he said.

Cox also wants police officers responding to domestic violence situations where children are present to report that to Child Protective Services, a division of the state Department of Human Services, even if the children were not the direct victims of the violence. Child abuse investigators would be required to investigate such reports within 24 hours.

Liz Boyd, spokeswoman for Gov. Jennifer Granholm, said the administration would be happy to review the proposed legislation, but noted that Granholm, as Michigan's former attorney general, initiated a federal grant for a pilot project to pay for assistant attorneys general to handle domestic violence cases in nine northern Michigan counties.

"Recently, the Department of Human Services strengthened its policies to trigger a preliminary investigation on any protective services complaint where domestic violence is in the home, even when the children are not the alleged victims," Boyd said.

Kathy Hagenian, executive policy director for the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violation, cautioned lawmakers about linking domestic violence to the Child Protection Law.

"The proposals are well-intentioned and they are a recognition that children are, indeed, affected by domestic violence," Hagenian said. "That being said, we are opposed to that type of response because we believe that will lead to damaging unintended consequences to child victims as well as adult victims of domestic violence."

Hagenian said that victims of domestic violence -- often mothers of young children -- are re-victimized when Child Protective Services becomes involved. She said domestic violence victims are often labeled unfit parents because they can't protect themselves or their children from a spouse or live-in partner.

Minnesota passed similar changes in child protection laws several years ago, she said, and then rescinded the laws because so many parents who were victims of domestic violence saw their children removed from their care.

Cox said national studies frequently find a link between domestic violence and child abuse and that a study by his office of 58 child fatalities in Wayne County over the past eight years found that 34 involved families with a history of domestic violence.

Of 1,760 new cases of child abuse or neglect opened in Wayne County between Jan. 1, 2005, and March 16, 469, or 27%, had a history of domestic violence, personal protection orders or anti-stalking orders, he said.

"If there are unintended consequences, which I can't see, there are ways to address those," Cox said.

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Cox wants child abuse investigations in domestic violence cases

3/23/2006, 4:38 p.m. ET

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Attorney General Mike Cox says more child abuse could be stopped if state caseworkers were required to investigate how children were being treated in homes where domestic violence is reported to police.

But his push for legislation to require police to notify the state Department of Human Services of every domestic violence incident where children are present and to require DHS caseworkers to investigate within 24 hours of receiving the report drew criticism from a domestic abuse shelter director.

"I'm afraid that this type of legislation would lead to women being afraid to call police (and) more removal of the children from a loving, nonviolent parent," said Holly Rosen, director of MSU Safe Place in East Lansing. "That just doesn't seem like a helpful response for anyone." Cox said during a news conference that research shows a strong correlation between domestic violence and child abuse.

The Administration for Children and Families, a division of the U.S. Department for Health and Human Services, reported in 2003 that there are child and adult victims in 30 to 60 percent of families experiencing domestic violence.

"Incidents of domestic violence provide an early warning system for the potential for child abuse," Cox said. "But early warning systems only work if someone is warned, and if something is done."

Kathy Hagenian of the Michigan Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence in Okemos said Minnesota tried the approach Cox is suggesting, but repealed the law after it failed to work as expected.

Minnesota caseworkers were overwhelmed by the required investigations, many of which never found proven abuse or neglect, she said.

Hagenian noted that batterers often persuade their victims to keep silent by telling them a call to police could result in their children being taken away. She added that police already are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to state caseworkers, including in homes where they investigate domestic abuse.

Cox said that's not always good enough.

"Agencies that exist to protect children are not informed of domestic violence incidents in households where children are present, unless the children show actual physical or outward signs of abuse," he said. "As a result, no follow-up investigations to check on the health and well-being of the children take place."

The state's 700 Child Protective Services caseworkers last year investigated 72,286 of the 128,884 child abuse and neglect complaints that came in, according to DHS figures. The number of cases in which abuse or neglect was confirmed rose 19 percent between 2000 and 2005 to 18,100, and the number of children found to be abused or neglected rose nearly 5 percent to 28,192.

The Republican attorney general said it would be up to the governor and the Legislature to decide how to come up with the money to hire additional caseworkers if more were needed to

handle the investigations triggered by his proposals. Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm already has asked for 51 additional caseworkers in the budget year that starts Oct. 1.

DHS spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said she didn't know many extra investigations the legislation would trigger, or how many caseworkers would be needed to handle them. She said department officials would look over the legislation once it's introduced, but noted DHS already changed its policies in January to look more closely at domestic violence situations.

A preliminary investigation now is triggered on any complaint where domestic violence is alleged to have occurred, even if the children are not alleged to be the victims, she said. The same is true if the case record suggests there's been a history of domestic violence in the home.

On the Net:

Michigan Attorney General's office: <http://www.michigan.gov/ag>

MSU Safe Place: [http://www.msu.edu/\(tilde\)safe](http://www.msu.edu/(tilde)safe)

Michigan Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence: <http://www.mcadsv.org/>

Published March 24, 2006
Lansing State Journal

Cox links child abuse, domestic violence

AG wants police to alert agencies to check on kids

Staff and Wire Reports

More child abuse could be stopped if state caseworkers were required to investigate the treatment of children where domestic violence is reported to police, Attorney General Mike Cox said Thursday.

Citing studies linking domestic violence and child abuse, Cox said laws are needed to require law enforcement authorities to alert child protective services when they find children in the home.

National studies indicate that 30 percent to 60 percent of homes with domestic violence also experience child abuse, Cox said.

"Incidences of domestic violence provide an early warning signal of potential child abuse," Cox said. "But early warning systems don't work if no one is warned and if nothing is done."

But his push drew criticism from the director of a local domestic abuse shelter.

"I'm afraid that this type of legislation would lead to women being afraid to call police (and) more removal of the children from a loving, nonviolent parent," said Holly Rosen, director of MSU Safe Place in East Lansing. "That just doesn't seem like a helpful response for anyone."

Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said department officials would look over the legislation once it's introduced.

Statewide, cases in which abuse or neglect was confirmed rose 19 percent from 2000 to 2005 to 18,100, and the number of children found to be abused or neglected rose nearly 5 percent to 28,192.

The Republican attorney general said it would be up to the governor and Legislature to come up with the money to hire more caseworkers if needed to handle the investigations triggered by his proposals. Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm already has asked for 51 more caseworkers in the budget year that starts Oct. 1; the state has about 700 now.

Cox cited the Ricky Holland case as part of the reason for his push for new laws, although the link to the Williamston couple is unclear. He cited "a long history of domestic violence" between Tim and Lisa Holland, who are charged with killing the 7-year-old and dumping his body in rural Ingham County.

Testimony during an ongoing preliminary hearing, which will determine whether the case against them advances to trial, has brought up allegations of child abuse, but no mention of domestic violence.

Lisa Holland was charged with felonious assault in January after Tim Holland told police she tried to kill him in November by throwing a hair dryer into the shower with him. That charge was later dismissed. Lisa Holland still faces a misdemeanor domestic violence charge from a January incident that Tim Holland said prompted him to go to police.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said he is not aware of any other domestic violence between the Hollands.

State Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, has agreed to work on the legislation that Cox is suggesting. Law announced earlier this month that he will lead a child protection subcommittee to look into what went wrong in the Holland case and whether Ricky's death could have been prevented.

The subcommittee has not announced when it will meet.

Staff writers Stacey Range and Kevin Grasha contributed to this report.

Friday, March 24, 2006

U.S. beefs up child porn fight

U.S. Attorney's office will seek maximum penalties, including against a Clio man charged with abuse.

Paul Egan / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- The U.S. attorney's office will seek maximum penalties for all who abuse or exploit children as part of a new initiative announced Thursday to fight child pornography.

U.S. Attorney Stephen Murphy said he has assigned seven assistant attorneys, led by Assistant Attorney John O'Brien, to become experts on child exploitation cases.

Murphy's office also will work more closely with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and will launch an Internet safety and awareness program in local schools, he said at a news conference in Detroit.

"If we can't do all we can to protect (children), then we can't do much," Murphy said. "We intend to put these sick individuals in jail for as long as we possibly can."

Murphy also announced a three-count indictment against a Flint-area man on child pornography charges.

Alan Sain, 28, of Clio is charged with enticing a child to engage in sexually explicit conduct, transmitting child pornography and possessing child pornography.

Sain, through e-mail contact with an undercover officer posing as a mother of a young girl, tried to set up a sexual encounter with the girl, officials said. Officials have evidence Sain abused a child or children and produced pornography himself, Murphy said.

But he would not comment on the age of the child or children allegedly involved or whether officials had been able to locate any of the children pictured in images Sain allegedly transmitted.

Sain, who is in custody and is to be arraigned in federal court in Flint on Monday, could not be reached for comment.

Under the policy announced Thursday, Murphy would seek a 30-year prison term on the enticement charge, which carries a minimum penalty of 15 years in prison upon conviction.

Murphy said child pornography is a \$3 billion-a-year business and growing, with up to 3,000 child predators using the Internet at any given time. The eastern district of Michigan has 65 child exploitation cases under investigation, he said.

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Kids found home alone in drug raid

Friday, March 24, 2006

By Scott Hagens

Jackson Citizen Patriot

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Police raided a house in the 400 block of N. State Street on Tuesday night and found two boys baby-sitting an infant -- and drugs on a nearby table.

The mother had apparently told the two older boys, ages 7 and 8, to care for their 6-month-old brother while she went to work at a local strip club, police said.

"They were told not to go to sleep until she gets home," Michigan State Police Detective Lt. Steve Galbreath said. "She gets home around 2:30 in the morning."

The mother has not been arrested, but she could face charges of child abuse or endangerment, and a charge of maintaining a drug house, Galbreath said.

Authorities raided the house about 10 p.m. because a 24-year-old woman -- who lives with the 22-year-old mother and her three children -- is under suspicion for selling crack cocaine, Galbreath said.

When police arrived, no one was home but the three children. The two older boys were sitting on the couch, while their baby brother laid next to them.

On one side of the couch was a table with marijuana on it, on the other side was a table with a razor blade containing cocaine residue, Jackson police Officer Ed Smith said.

The 8-year-old boy told police his mother leaves every evening for work and returns home in the early hours, Galbreath said.

"I asked them what they would do if something happened to the baby," he said. "They had no clue. ! There was no phone."

Police went to the strip club looking for the mother, but she apparently was not working that night, Galbreath said. The mother has not been interviewed, and police are unsure where she was that night.

The three children were removed from the home and placed in the care of Children's Protective Services.

Police are looking into possible charges against the 24-year-old woman, Galbreath said.

Infant Left Alone In Locked Car

Mother Arrested Upon Returning To Scene

POSTED: 5:26 pm EST March 23, 2006

Police broke a window to rescue an infant who was left alone inside a locked car on Detroit's west side Thursday afternoon.

Witness Clayton Carter said the 7-month-old was in the car for about 30 or 40 minutes before police arrived, according to a Local 4 report.

The mother was at a dentist office, the station learned. She later arrived at the scene and was taken into custody, Local 4 reported.

The infant was transported to Children's Hospital for observation, but was expected to be OK, according to police.

No further information was available.

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Published March 24, 2006

Lansing State Journal

State wants sanctions against Highfields

Facility could lose its license for violations

By Hugh Leach

Lansing State Journal

ONONDAGA - The state Department of Human Services is recommending disciplinary action against Highfields Inc. that could include revocation of its license.

The agency's investigation showed the juvenile care facility violated several standards for overseeing youths who were housed there.

The violations validate two previously publicized allegations: that staffers used "excessive physical restraint" by taking a boy outside in the cold without a coat for up to an hour and that a staffer condoned and failed to report a hazing incident in which boys pelted a newcomer with shampoo, shaving cream cans and spoiled milk while he was in the shower.

The Highfields Board of Directors conducted its internal investigation after allegations of mistreatment of residents arose earlier this year.

The allegations prompted Ing-ham County judges to stop sending boys there for residential treatment.

Two staff members were fired, and several others were reprimanded. Meanwhile, residential programs at the facility have been shut down.

Human services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said the Highfields board could head off possible license revocation by making a plan to correct problem areas.

Board Chairman Charles Corley said the board has not seen the state's report.

"Once we get the report and sort through it, we'll know more," he said.

The board already is working on a plan, he said, and the report could identify additional areas that need to be addressed.

The board also hopes to hire a Michigan State University professor who is an expert on juvenile issues to help review the organization.

Corley would not identify that person.

Contact Hugh Leach at 377-1119 or hleach@lsj.com

Mar 24, 7:52 AM EST
Detroit News online

Three juveniles flee Kent County lockup; two recaptured

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) -- Three handcuffed teenage detainees escaped from custody while being transported back to a juvenile lockup after a court appearance, but two of them were recaptured within hours, police say.

Girls ages 12 and 14 and a 15-year-old boy fled the Juvenile Detention Center about 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Kent County Undersheriff Jon Hess told The Grand Rapids Press for a story on its Web site. The newspaper said the girls were handcuffed together, while the boy wore handcuffs and a belly chain.

A sheriff's deputy was letting the boy out of a van when he took off, Hess said. He said the deputy chased the boy, and the girls then took off as well.

The boy and the 12-year-old girl were recaptured, but the 14-year-old girl remained at large Friday morning, the sheriff's department said.

Officials say the girls and boy were being held for probation violations.

On Feb. 28, a man accused of shooting a Grand Rapids police officer escaped from custody of a Kent County corrections officer during a break in his attempted murder trial. Otis Nelson was recaptured, and the deputy was disciplined.

"This is very serious for this department on the heels of the Otis Nelson thing, and I am very concerned if it is an error or lack of judgment or someone not following policy," Hess said.

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Boy to serve detention

13-year-old who molested girl, 7, will also receive treatment

Friday, March 24, 2006

BY TOM TOLEN

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

A 13-year old Brighton boy who pleaded guilty to two felonies stemming from the molestation of a 7-year-old girl at the Brighton District Library was sentenced Monday to 127 days detention and recommended for treatment at a long-term residential treatment center in another state.

The boy, whose name is not being disclosed by The News because of his age, was given credit for 97 days already spent at juvenile detention facilities in Washtenaw and Shiawassee counties.

The boy had pleaded guilty Feb. 3 to charges of second degree criminal sexual conduct and gross indecency in connection with the Dec. 13, 2005, incident in which he lured the girl into a bathroom at the library and molested her. As part of a plea agreement, two other charges - first degree criminal sexual conduct and accosting for immoral purposes - were dismissed.

The boy will have another hearing April 25, at which it will be determined whether he qualifies for facilities in Iowa or Wyoming, both of which specialize in treatment for juvenile sexual offenders.

"If you are qualified for the program and they have openings, you can go immediately," said Kathleen Oemke, attorney referee in the juvenile division of Livingston County Family Court.

The boy would be housed in the treatment facility for up to 24 months.

"We're pleased with the results," said County Prosecutor Dave Morse. "We felt it was important (the boy) be out of the community in a secure setting for a period of offender treatment (so) he gets the help he needs."

The teen's attorney, Mitch Perrault, recommended the boy be allowed to return home and receive counseling. However, others involved in the case, including the attorney appointed to represent the boy, recommended treatment out of the area.

"We don't look at (the boy) as being some monster," the girl's father told the court, looking toward the boy. "We want nothing more than for him to get the help he needs."

The girl, who spoke briefly at the hearing, said she would like to hear her assailant say he was sorry. The boy then stood up and said, "I'm really sorry about what I did; I was not thinking."

The boy's parents and attorney declined comment.

Tom Tolen can be reached at ttolen@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at 810-844-2009.

Granholm signs bill to help victims of domestic violence

Prosecutors get OK to use past evidence, previous behavior

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Starting in May, prosecutors can use evidence of a victim's past statements and a defendant's previous behavior in domestic violence cases under legislation signed Thursday by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

The laws are aimed at better

protecting women and other victims of domestic abuse.

One bill creates an exception to court rules by letting prosecutors, under certain circumstances, present evidence of a defendant's past behavior for any purpose for which it's relevant — unless it's excluded for being unfairly prejudicial against the defendant.

Another bill expands criminal

rules to allow the statements of victims or others to be used when they might normally be barred as hearsay.

Sen. Beverly Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, sponsor of one bill, said victims of domestic violence are scared to face their attackers in court.

"Their previous statements in regard to the physical attack become crucial in the case against the offender," Hammerstrom said in a statement.

Prosecutors say domestic violence cases pose unique barriers to successful prosecutions

because victims are reluctant to testify, physical evidence is lacking and there often are few witnesses.

A defendant's past behavior is generally off limits during a trial.

The reasoning is that jurors shouldn't convict someone for being a "bad guy" but instead base their decision on evidence that is presented in the case before them.

Prosecutors say the changes in the legislation could make it easier to prosecute those who abuse their spouses.



Granholm

Friday, March 24, 2006

Court backs dad, ends kid support

Payments dropped, arrearages eliminated

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Fathers paying child support for children who are not biologically theirs were cheering Thursday for Doug Richardson, who went to court and got his child support payments stopped and what he owes wiped out.

Still, Richardson said his fight is not over. He will continue to work to get laws in Michigan changed.

"It's a good step in the right way for others in the court system," Richardson said, "but I have a road ahead of me, working with (lawmakers)."

Richardson paid an estimated \$80,000 in child support over 15 years to his ex-wife even though a DNA test showed their first son was not his. Richardson said he paid support to his ex-wife while she lived with the child's biological father and then later to the biological father when the couple split up.

During the 2 1/2 hour court hearing on Thursday, Richardson's attorney, Michele Kelly, negotiated with attorney Robert J. Dunn, who represented Richardson's ex-wife, Bonnie Lauria. Dunn said Lauria wanted peace of mind for her family, and agreed to dismiss the child support. "He doesn't have to pay because I said enough," said Lauria, 42, of Bay City. "He's had my children on the TV so many times. It was ridiculous. I don't make the laws. It's not my fault. I am glad it's over."

Richardson was planning to represent himself in court but Kelly, of Northville, offered to represent him after reading about his plight in The Detroit News.

He was a father for less than five years when he learned his son wasn't his biological child.

Richardson got married when he was 19 after his then-girlfriend wife told him she was pregnant with his child. The couple had a second son during the marriage who is Richardson's.

Richardson learned before their divorce that another man was the father of the first son, which DNA tests confirmed in 1992. A man becomes a legal father in Michigan when he is married to the mother at conception or birth or signs a voluntary affidavit of parentage, typically at the hospital when the child is born, said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support in the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Richardson's victory was good news to Michael Williams, a Detroit dad who is obligated to pay child support for seven children, five of whom are not his.

"Maybe the same thing can happen to me," Williams said.

Bills in Michigan's Legislature designed to give relief in such cases include one from state Rep. Lamar Lemmons III, D-Detroit, that would require courts to withdraw child support orders when DNA tests prove that men aren't the biological father. At least 12 other states have passed similar laws.

Fathers will need to lobby lawmakers because even though Thursday was a victory for Richardson, the issue of paternity fraud was not addressed, said Murray Davis, an advocate for fathers who was at the hearing.

Lemmons said he hopes Richardson's case will spur his fellow lawmakers to take action.

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com

Heating costs sap consumers

■ Households use less but pay more for heating oil, natural gas, despite mild winter weather.

BY JENNIFER STEINHAUER
New York Times

Americans have spent more money heating their homes this winter than in a generation, despite mild weather that has kept down heating fuel consumption.

State and local governments have enlisted Boy Scouts to insulate homes, offered tax breaks on fuel-efficient products and recycled newspaper to make insulation to warm the homes of the poor in one of the nation's frostier states.

Recently, President Bush signed a bill to provide \$1 billion in federal energy assistance to poor households in addition to \$2 billion allocated so far this year. Congress has battled over legislation to provide help for the coldest states, and the law includes the most money ever allotted for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

The price of heating oil reached \$2.38 a gallon this winter, the highest price since 1981 — even adjusting for inflation — according to federal figures, roughly 60 percent higher than the average price per gallon from 1999 to 2004.

The prices, even against the backdrop of a winter punctuated by blooming flowers in December and unadjusted thermostats, resulted in a 45 percent increase in household spending on fuel compared with the average of the last several years — \$1,386 per home — even though consumption fell 9 percent in the same period.

The story was the same in

homes that use natural gas and propane for heating. Natural gas reached its highest price on record in late 2005, according to the federal figures, and spending rose to \$867 per home, a 35 percent increase over previous years.

"The hurricanes knocked about 80 percent of the gas production from the Gulf of Mexico off-line, helping push the price of natural

gas this winter to the highest levels ever," said Tancred Lidderdale, the senior economist for the Energy Information Administration, an agency of Energy Department.

"Similarly," Lidderdale said, "the impact on crude oil production and refining in the gulf drove heating prices to the highest levels since the Iranian Revolution."

In response, states expanded their subsidized heating programs, spent millions of dollars on public service campaigns promoting conservation and enlisted volunteers and private businesses to help.

In Kalamazoo, Mich., residents on the north side of town, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, "talked about high heating costs and their fear that they could not

afford to heat their homes," Mayor Hannah McKinney said.

The city created a program in which donated newspapers were collected by volunteers, turned into insulation by a local company and installed in homes.

In Kansas, the state's energy department bought 10,600 kits filled with foam weather stripping, low-flow shower heads and other conservation items, and then asked the Boy Scouts, church groups and other civic organizations to distribute and install them in some of the 93,000 homes of qualified residents statewide.

Given that Kansas had its warmest January on record — with Topeka temperatures averaging 52 degrees instead of the usual 20 degrees — state officials said they were well-positioned to roll out the program next year.

"With these strange weather patterns, we are not going to luck out forever," said Jim Ploger, the director of the Kansas Energy Office.

Georgia and other states have declared so-called sales tax holidays for appliances featuring the Energy Star ratings given by the Department of Energy, and, in Pennsylvania, the governor's office is arranging weekly weatherization workshops in Lowe's home-improvement stores.

In Connecticut, 24,000 low-income households and the state's homeless shelters got single deliveries of up to 200 gallons of heating oil at 40 percent off the retail price.

Eight states accepted discounted heating oil from the Citgo Petroleum Corp., owned by the government of Venezuela, whose president, Hugo Chavez, has close ties to Fidel Castro of Cuba and who has been critical of Bush.

Friday, March 24, 2006

Detroit News editorial

Poll is no-confidence vote for Granholm

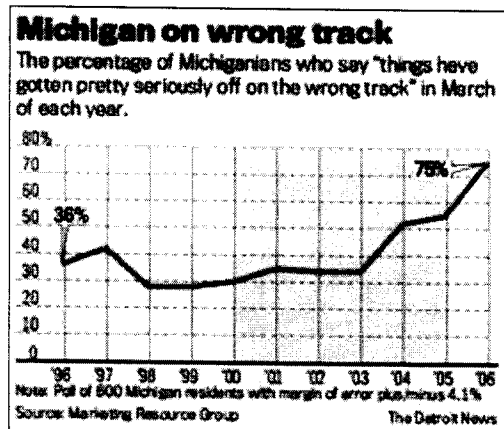
Three-fourths say state is headed in wrong direction

No matter which horse you're backing in the fall gubernatorial race, there's little to rejoice about in the latest poll numbers that show three-quarters of Michigan residents say the state is headed to hell in a handbasket.

Never have Michigan citizens been so disillusioned about the direction of their state or less hopeful for the future.

And for good reason. Michigan continues to trail the nation in almost every economic indicator, with no sign that the trend will soon reverse.

The survey by Marketing Resource Group of Lansing is particularly distressing because if the people who live here don't have hope for the state's revival, how can Michigan convince the job creators and talented workers from outside the state that they'll find a bright future here?



Given the poll numbers, it's absurd for the apologists of Gov. Jennifer Granholm to be running about the state condemning her challenger, Grand Rapids businessman Dick DeVos, for not having a plan for fixing Michigan. DeVos has been a candidate for only a few months. Granholm has been governor for more than three years, and if she has a plan, as her backers claim, only one of two conclusions can be drawn based on the MRG poll:

- Voters are unaware such a plan exists.
- Or they don't believe it's a plan that will work.

The truth is that Granholm has not clearly articulated a strategy for revival and has failed to rally Michigan residents to a blueprint for pulling the state of this mess. She doesn't have a plan, she has a veto pen, which she uses to kill any ideas put forward by the Legislature -- something she's indicated she'll do with the Single Business Tax elimination bill.

The governor's justification for the veto is that GOP lawmakers have not offered ideas for replacing the revenue from the Single Business Tax.

But she's the governor -- she ought to be offering those alternatives or working with the Legislature to find them, rather than sitting back waiting for others to do the heavy lifting.

Many forces are at work to discourage Michigan residents, not the least of which is the collapse of the domestic auto industry.

But when this many people express so little confidence in the direction of the state, it's a very clear indication of a severe leadership deficit.